



EFN Report on Vaccination: Nurses' competencies in Prevention

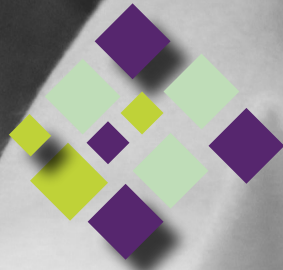
A Comparative Overview of
35 European Countries

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EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF NURSES ASSOCIATIONS



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EFN BRUSSELS

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Executive Summary

Vaccination features high on the agenda of the European Institutions as well as at the level of individual countries and healthcare authorities. Despite the demonstrated benefits of many kinds of vaccination it remains a controversial issue largely due to misinformation, restricted access, health illiteracy and cost. The consequences of low uptakes of certain kinds of vaccination can be damaging to the health and economic welfare of vulnerable citizens across Europe, and by extension to their families and wider communities. Nurses are the frontline staff largely responsible for delivering safe and effective vaccination programmes to communities across Europe, yet rarely get formal recognition for this life-saving endeavour. In addition to administering vaccination, nurses have key competencies (Directive 2013/55/EU) and roles relating to educating the public, identifying vulnerable groups, raising awareness and promoting uptake among those who stand to benefit. The Ebola experience taught us that we cannot be prepared anywhere if we are not prepared everywhere. Vaccination programmes are a key measure of preparedness, yet to date a Europe-wide understanding of the nature of nurses' contribution to vaccination programmes has been restricted – this hinders efficient and effective policy making at European level, and it is what the current report has sought to redress. After a meeting with DG Sante Director General, the 35 Members of the European Federation of Nurses' Associations (EFN) were invited to respond to a pan-European questionnaire survey on nurses' actions relating to vaccination. Consisting of eight question items the survey achieved a response rate of 60% with 21 out of 35 EFN Members responding to the call within the timeframe. The analysis of the survey results revealed that nurses across Europe have wide and varied roles with regard vaccination. Nurses are the frontline staff involved in surveillance, monitoring, planning, delivering and evaluating the success of vaccination programmes; however, there is great variety among EU Member States. Nurses deliver vaccination-related nursing care in diverse settings ranging from acute hospitals, schools, older persons facilities, workplaces and peoples' homes. The responses suggested that only a small proportion of vaccination activity takes place where it would actually be most convenient and accessible to citizens, such as their homes and areas of work. This illustrates that current vaccination provision remains health service/professional centred, rather than patient centred, and a drastic shift in this regard is warranted, as advocated by EFN.

Based on the EFN Members' responses to the survey reported on here, the EFN recommends to the European institutions, Governments and relevant health **stakeholders**:

Invest in capacity building to empower nurses as the frontline professionals educating citizens on and administering vaccinations.

Develop a nurse-led positive media campaign to restore citizens' trust and confidence in vaccines.

Support the development of advanced nurse practice with extended prescribing rights to make vaccination more accessible to citizens.

Support the exchange of best practice around communicating the benefits of authorised vaccines among European countries.


Provide support for vaccination closer to where citizens work and live their lives;

Support nurses' extending vaccination coverage in schools, workplaces and older persons' care facilities through appropriate education and training.

Provide comprehensive evidence-based information for nurses and encourage vaccination uptake especially when working with vulnerable patient groups.

Develop evidence-based decision-making capacity in nurses to support them fulfil their public health education remit for, and beyond, vaccination.

Support and facilitate the exchange of best practices in vaccination policies among European countries.





Summary Report

Background

Vaccination features high on the agenda of the European Institutions as well as at the level of individual countries and healthcare authorities. Despite the demonstrated benefits of many kinds of vaccination it remains a controversial issue largely due to misinformation, restricted access, health illiteracy and cost. Less than 3% of OECD countries' health budgets is allocated to prevention programmes, of which less than 10% is for immunisation. Spending on prevention took a significant hit following the global financial crisis, the tragic consequences of which are only now being realised. The consequences of low uptakes of certain kinds of vaccination can be damaging to the health and economic welfare of vulnerable citizens across Europe, and by extension to their families and wider communities. The recent tragic events are a stark reminder of this, as noted by the ECDC's Director, Dr Andrea Ammon: "It is tragic and unacceptable that 49 children and adults in EU countries have died from complications of measles infection in the past 2 years, while safe and effective vaccines are readily available". Low uptake of vaccination is due to a combination of factors, most significant among which are lack of confidence and trust in the vaccination programme, and low accessibility/ inconvenient access to vaccines. Nurses are the frontline staff largely res-

ponsible for delivering safe and effective vaccination programmes to communities across Europe, yet rarely get formal recognition for this life-saving endeavour. In addition to administering vaccination, nurses in many countries have additional wide and varied roles relating to educating the public, identifying vulnerable groups, raising awareness and promoting uptake among those who would benefit from vaccination. The EFN report on Member States' preparedness for Ebola highlighted an astonishing lack of preparedness and issued concrete recommendations for European countries to become proactive rather than reactive to such pandemics. The Ebola experience taught us that we cannot be prepared anywhere if we are not prepared everywhere. Vaccination programmes are a key measure of preparedness, yet to date a Europe-wide understanding of the nature of nurses' contribution to vaccination programmes has been restricted –this hinders efficient and effective policy making at European level, and it is what the current report seeks to redress.

General care nurses' competences within Directive 2013/55/EU Prevention is at the heart of nursing care across Europe and a key feature of nurses' daily work. Because of the nature of the nursing profession, nurses are ideally equipped in promoting public health and collaborating with other health and social care professionals; supporting patients and citizens in achieving their health goals and creating a healthier population. The competence of nurses to promote health, healthy lifestyles, and preventive measures is clearly recognised in Article 31.7 of Directive 2013/55/EU that provides a list of the competences for a nurse responsible for general care:

competence to independently diagnose the nursing care required using current theoretical and clinical knowledge and to plan, organise and implement nursing care when treating patients on the basis of the knowledge and skills acquired in accordance with points (a), (b) and (c) of paragraph 6 in order to improve professional practice.

competence to work together effectively with other actors in the health sector, including participation in the practical training of health personnel on the basis of the knowledge and skills acquired in accordance with points (d) and (e) of paragraph 6.

competence to empower individuals, families and groups towards healthy lifestyles and self-care on the basis of the knowledge and skills acquired in accordance with points (a) and (b) of paragraph 6.

competence to independently initiate life-preserving immediate measures and to carry out measures in crises and disaster situations.

competence to independently give advice to, instruct and support persons needing care and their attachment figures.

competence to independently assure the quality of, and to evaluate, nursing care.

competence to comprehensively communicate professionally and to cooperate with members of other professions in the health sector.

competence to analyse the care quality to improve his own professional practice as a nurse responsible for general care.'



The survey

The survey reported on here was developed to help investigate and establish a Europe-wide understanding of nurses' contribution to vaccination programmes, in order to generate an evidence-base from which to make robust policy recommendations for a coherent and cohesive way forward at European level. In January 2018, the 35 Members of the European Federation of Nurses' Associations (EFN) were invited to respond to a pan-European questionnaire survey on nurses' actions relating to vaccination. Consisting of eight question items the survey solicited responses on nurses' role in vaccination across the different European countries. Analysis of the quantitative responses to the survey items made use of descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, graph and tabulation techniques. Qualitative comments were coded thematically and summarised under broad categories following standards procedures. Amalgamated data from the questionnaire questions are presented and discussed in the following section, teasing out key policy recommendations arising from the EFN Members' responses. In addition, each respondent's contribution to the survey is presented separately through a country by country profile as an addendum to this report.

Results

3.1 Response rate

The survey achieved a response rate of 60%, with 21 out of 35 EFN Members responding to the call within the timeframe. Responses from the following countries are represented in this report: Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.





3.2 Responses to survey items

A question by question analysis follows, with graphs used to illustrate relevant data where appropriate. Each EFN Member's responses to the survey question are reproduced in the latter part of this report in the form of a country profile.

Question 1: *What activities should the EU undertake in order to better support healthcare professionals in advising citizens on their vaccination needs and in strengthening confidence in vaccines?*

This first question invited input in the form of open comments. Textual analysis of these comments revealed the existence of four overarching themes in the following order of popularity: a) capacity building/training for nurses; b) positive media campaigns for the public; c) Europe-wide coordination on vaccination; and d) nurse prescribing to make vaccination more accessible to the public. These four themes are discussed in turn next. First, the most frequently mentioned item related to capacity building for nurses largely in the form of education and training around the benefits of vaccination. EFN Members responding to this question noted the challenges nurses face when interacting with members of the public who often have incorrect information about vaccination from unreliable sources. Clear evidence-based information on the benefits of vaccination is needed to empower nurses to counter misinformed arguments from the public, largely driven by the social media epidemic of 'fake news'. Developing nurses' capacity in evidence-based decision making is therefore an area in need of investment and would benefit from further support. Second, the EFN Members noted they would welcome a coordinated positive media campaign for European citizens on the advantages of vaccination. Such a cam-


paign should clearly feature nurses as key members of the wider multidisciplinary healthcare team, so the campaign also helps to reinforce trust between the public and healthcare professionals. Latest polls, both from Europe and North America, reveal that the public perceives nurses as the most trusted professionals – a nurse-led positive media campaign would therefore go a long way towards building trust and confidence of the public in the benefits of vaccination. Third, while EU policy action did not feature highly in EFN Members' responses, support for a coordinated vaccination schedule and surveillance across European countries was welcomed. The movement of citizens across countries requires greater coordination to ensure a Europe wide level of protection and preparedness. This would be enabled by greater and easier access to vaccinations through extending prescribing rights to appropriately trained advanced nurse practitioners. Nurse prescribing has already been shown to hold great benefits for chronic conditions and community care in the countries that have implemented this. Advanced practice nurses with prescribing rights can help make vaccines more accessible to the public, reducing waiting times and unnecessary bureaucracy.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Invest in capacity building to empower nurses as the frontline professionals educating citizens on and administering vaccinations.

Develop a nurse-led positive media campaign to restore citizens' confidence in vaccines and healthcare professionals.

Support the development of advanced nurse practice with extended prescribing rights to make vaccination more accessible to citizens.



Question 2: Does the EU provide adequate communication to healthcare professionals on the benefits of authorised vaccines to maintain or increase trust? The majority (88%) of EFN Members who responded to this question felt that the EU provides some, but not adequate communication to healthcare professionals on the benefits of authorised vaccines. Members indicated EU activity could improve in this area, although many countries already have many communication channels of their own. In this regard, EU support could be directed to ensuring best practice is exchanged between European countries.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Support the exchange of best practice around communicating the benefits of authorised vaccines among European countries.

Question 3: In your country, in which settings do nurses perform vaccination? - Best practices of nurses performing vaccination - Based on the responses to this question, the majority of vaccination activity by nurses appears to take place in: Primary Care Clinics/ Health Centres of varying kind (27%) and Hospitals (15%). Looking at the national data, most of the vaccination performed by nurses in Primary Care Clinics/ Health Centres of varying kind concerns child vaccination programmes (Cyprus, Denmark, Norway, UK), influenza vaccination campaign (Denmark, Hungary, Norway, France except for the first injection and for a list of people that can benefit from the influenza vaccine injection by a nurse established in the Decree of 19 June 2011), and refugee health services (Cyprus, Denmark, Norway). It is also relevant the role of nurses performing vaccination in kindergartens and schools (13%), with a coverage of different education levels in several countries (Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, UK). Other settings in which nurses perform vaccination are the General/ Family Practices (12%), including adult and paediatrician practice (Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, UK) and Older Persons' Care facilities (11%) (Bulgaria, Slovenia, Switzerland, UK) that follow in similar percentages. Surprisingly, less than 10% of vaccination takes place where it would actually be most convenient and accessible to the public such as their home (6%) (Switzerland, UK), area of work (6%) (Estonia, Hungary) and their community pharmacy (4%) (Italy, Portugal). This illustrates that current vaccination provision is still health service/professional centred, rather than patient centred, and a drastic shift in this regard looks to be warranted. Other settings in which nurses are in charge of performing vaccination are: travel centres (Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Norway); and maternity units (Estonia, UK).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Provide support for vaccination closer to where citizens work and live their lives.



Question 4: Are you in favour of nurses being responsible to extend the vaccination coverage (schools, elderly care homes, etc.)? The EFN Members responding to this survey are in the majority in favour of nurses being responsible to extend vaccination coverage, with 85% of respondents indicating support for this. This is expected given that a number of countries already have this in place, including Norway, Portugal and Sweden. At the same time, the EFN Members warned that such an extension would need to be supported by education and training for those nurses to ensure a consistent and high-quality level of vaccination-related nursing care is provided across countries in Europe.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Support nurses' extending vaccination coverage in schools, workplaces and older persons' care facilities through appropriate education and training.

Question 5: a) In your country, is it compulsory for nurses to be vaccinated to perform the profession? b) Are you in favour? The majority (65%) of respondents to this question indicated that vaccination for nurses is not obligatory for them to perform the profession. Of the ones indicating vaccination to be obligatory, this was largely for Hepatitis B but not for influenza. Only 17 Members (48% of EFN membership) answered the second part of the question (Are you in favour?), out of which 65% were in favour and 35% against. Those who were not in favour indicated that compulsory vaccination may create the opposite of the intended effect, that of greater mistrust and resistance. These EFN Members recommended adequate information for nurses to be able to make an informed decision, although noting that vaccination should still be encouraged.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Provide comprehensive evidence-based information for nurses and encourage vaccination uptake especially when working with vulnerable patient groups.

Question 6: Do you think that nurses should be more active in providing scientific arguments in favour of vaccination programmes? All of the respondents to this question agreed that evidence-based arguments form the cornerstone of nursing practice. Because of nurses' proximity to the public, being aware of current best evidence on the benefits of vaccination programmes is seen as important for safe practice and something to be promoted. Respondents also indicated that this practice is already in place in many countries, and this needs to continue to be supported.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Develop evidence-based decision-making capacity in nurses to support them fulfil their public health education remit for and beyond vaccination.

Question 7: Do you think that nurses are among the most responsible actors for ensuring that vaccination programmes are successful? The majority (71%) of respondents to this question agreed that nurses are among the most responsible actors for ensuring that vaccination programmes are successful. Respondents commented that in many countries the public place a great deal of trust to their nurses who administer the vaccines. They rely on them to provide up to date evidence-based information and advice, and in this way ensuring the success of vaccination programmes.





Question 8: Do you consider that the EU system should further support and facilitate the exchange of best practices in vaccination policies among Member States? The majority (86%) of EFN Members who responded to this question would welcome exchange of best practices in vaccination policies. Members noted this is the ethically sound approach to adopt, since shared learning with consistent approaches and messages is facilitative of safe and high-quality practice.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

The EU should support and facilitate the exchange of best practices in vaccination policies among European countries.

Conclusion

The analysis of the EFN Members' responses to the survey questions revealed significant areas for policy attention that hold benefit for countries across Europe. A return to a pre-vaccination era would be catastrophic for Europe socially, economically and morally. Coordinated action is warranted to ensure nurses and nursing meet society's mandate to protect and promote the health of Europe's citizens through provision of safe and high-quality nursing care.

Based on the results of the current survey **the EFN recommends** to the European institutions, Governments and relevant health stakeholders:

Invest in capacity building to empower nurses as the frontline professionals educating citizens on and administering vaccinations.

Develop a nurse-led positive media campaign to restore citizens' trust and confidence in vaccines and healthcare professionals.

Support the development of advanced nurse practice with extended prescribing rights to make vaccination more accessible to citizens.

Support the exchange of best practice around communicating the benefits of authorised vaccines among European countries.

Provide support for vaccination closer to where citizens work and live their lives;
Support nurses' extending vaccination coverage in schools, workplaces and older persons' care facilities through appropriate education and training.

Provide comprehensive evidence-based information for nurses and encourage vaccination uptake especially when working with vulnerable patient groups.

Develop evidence-based decision-making capacity in nurses to support them fulfil their public health education remit for, and beyond, vaccination.

Support and facilitate the exchange of best practices in vaccination policies among European countries.

In order to raise Europe's level of protection, countries across Europe should wake up to the risks involved with inadequate and incomplete preparation and get together behind an evidence-based agenda on vaccination. Nurses, as the largest and most trusted health professional group, have a key role to play in this endeavour.

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The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) was established in 1971 and is the independent voice of the profession. The EFN consists of National Nurses Associations from 34 EU Member States, working for the benefit of 6 million nurses throughout the European Union and Europe. The mission of EFN is to strengthen the status and practice of the profession of nursing for the benefit of the health of the citizens and the interests of nurses in the EU & Europe.

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